



Centennial Edition



A Publication Of The San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex

NOTES FROM THE REFUGE



Around The Complex

The National Wildlife Refuge System - *A Success Story*

Mendel Stewart, Project Leader, San Diego NWR

This is an exciting time for the National Wildlife Refuge System. March 14, 2003 marked the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of the first refuge. A variety of events and activities were celebrated that makes the entire year a very special one for the System. One national birthday event that is particularly exciting was at the actual site of the first refuge, Pelican Island, near Sebastian, Florida. Although Pelican Island was the very first refuge in the System, it was virtually forgotten until recently. Pelican Island suffered from little or no management of its resources as the wave action from boats passing by slowly eroded its shoreline, their occupants unaware of the island's important history and natural resources.

Today, there is a full-time staff managing the island and staff and community volunteers working hard at its restoration. On March 13 and 14, a Presidential proclamation was read for the Year of the National Wildlife Refuge, the grand opening of the Pelican Island Centennial Trail and Observation Tower, the rededication of the island as a National Historic Landmark

and an historical reenactment of the island's history. A time capsule exhibit containing articles submitted from each refuge in the System was dedicated and a Refuge System Flag Ceremony was held that raised a banner with the name of each of the 540 refuges across the country. A first day of issue ceremony for a U.S. Postage Stamp depicting Pelican Island and celebrating the System's centennial was also held. A variety of dignitaries from the Department of the Interior and the community attended.

As those of us with a history working for the Refuge System know, this day was long anticipated. It seemed like only a short time ago that we attended the first Refuge System conference in Keystone, Colorado. In reality, it's been five years. There we started planning for the centennial celebration and the opportunities it would bring to increase public awareness of the successes of the National Wildlife Refuge System. And provide an opportunity to show the world that one of America's best-kept secrets is the treasure we are charged with protecting for future generations.

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A Celebration of 100 Years

Time Capsule Exhibit and Reception, Chula Vista Nature Center, March 14, 2003



CELEBRATING A
CENTURY
of CONSERVATION



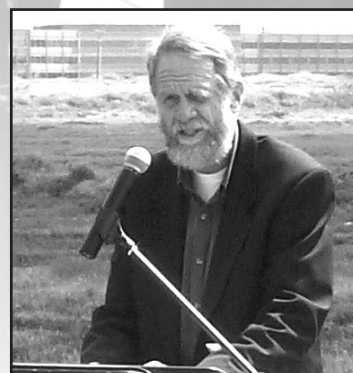
Mendel Stewart, Manager,
San Diego NWR Complex



Councilwoman Patti Davis reads a
proclamation pronouncing
March 14, 2003, National Wildlife
Refuge Day in Chula Vista



Kenneth McDermond,
FWS Deputy Operations Manager,
California/Nevada Operations Office.



Dr. Mike McCoy, representing both
himself and Patricia McCoy, City
Councilwoman from Imperial Beach
reads a proclamation from the City of
Imperial Beach.



County Supervisor
Greg Cox, a long-time
supporter of
San Diego's Refuges



Kris McNamara, Environmental Policy Director for
the Walt Disney Company, congratulates the NWR
System on its Centennial. The Walt Disney
Company's environmental education program for
elementary school students, Jiminy Cricket's
Environmentality Challenge, now includes
California's NWRs in its exciting program



Jim Bartel, Carlsbad Office
Field Supervisor

Around The Complex

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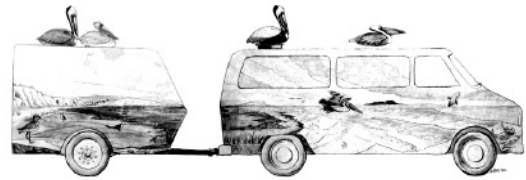
I believe the Refuge System is a major success story that should be known and celebrated by all Americans. The Refuge System has been throughout its history, and continues to be, a labor of love for the women and men who work on its behalf. The centennial brings us the opportunity to focus the public's attention on an agency and an organization that has accomplished much - and still has much to do. Refuges need additional support for the only national system of lands where wildlife comes first. Unfortunately herons and elk, snow geese and manatee, butterflies and songbirds don't vote - although I contend they do help pay taxes. If they did vote, support and the funding it brings would not be in short supply as it has always been for the Refuge System. With an adequate level of support, refuges across the nation would have the funds necessary to go the extra mile for the wildlife species they support. Even without adequate funding, the dedicated people who work on Refuges succeed not only at conserving and restoring wildlife habitat, but also at providing opportunities for the public to enjoy a variety of wildlife-dependent recreation.

Refuges across the country celebrated and will continue to celebrate events throughout the year, just as they did at Pelican Island. At the San Diego Complex, we joined our partners at the Zoological Society of San Diego in a centennial festival held at the Childrens Zoo on March 8, and with the dedication of a time capsule and exhibit in a community reception at the Chula Vista Nature Center. I encourage you to continue to visit refuges and attend events throughout this celebratory year and in the years ahead. Most of all we encourage you to enjoy these wild lands of the National Wildlife Refuge System. To find out more about the National Wildlife Refuges in San Diego and Orange Counties, go to <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>.



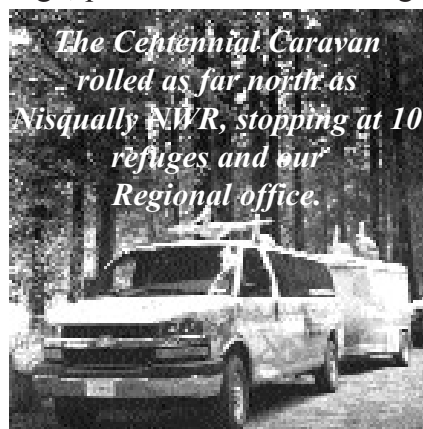
On The Road With The Pelican Van

John Bradley



The Friends of Seal Beach have accomplished many things this year, but perhaps the most notable is the Centennial Caravan. Before our Centennial year the Friends came up with the concept of a traveling "road show" to carry the refuge message and celebrate our Centennial. This was truly an innovative idea with an admirable goal - to expose as many people as possible to the NWRS and our Centennial. The Caravan would be a high profile, high visibility "event" and the Friends knew that it would take a huge effort to make it happen. They put a lot of work into securing funding but did not wait until funding was in hand to begin the detailed planning.

The flagship "Pelican Van" was brightly painted with nature/wildlife scenes and several large plastic pelicans were attached to the roof. It is an impressive site. The Friends created a website, a special Centennial Caravan logo, produced a video that highlighted the




refuge system, put together educational materials on the system and developed a special package (brochures, games, etc.) that focused on elementary school

children, including a separate teacher's packet. They had special training in interacting with the public and worked, then re-worked their ambitious itinerary.

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From March 22 through April 6, the Centennial Caravan rolled as far north as Nisqually NWR, stopping at 10 refuges and our Regional office. They logged over 3,200 miles and personally contacted an estimated 5,000 people. At each stop the Friends met with their counterparts to learn how others assist refuges. They focused their efforts where they would meet the maximum number of people; museums, city centers and even at roadside rest areas to visit with whoever stopped by. And, of course, the Blue Goose made an appearance at each stop.

As important and exciting as the Caravan was the Friends did not rest on this success. From the beginning the idea was to use the Pelican Van to carry environmental education and refuge information to the community. Upon returning the Friends set an ambitious goal of at least one Pelican Van visit per week to a school, then set up their website to allow teachers to sign up. With a potential 8 million person Los Angeles/Orange County "service area" they adopted the strategy of meeting in "assembly" format, thereby visiting multiple classes. The combination of the van, video, educational information and plain homespun tales has proven to be an effective and entertaining way to pass on the information and they are much in demand. 

To request a visit from the Pelican Van for your school or organization, please call (562) 598-1024 or for more information go to the Caravan web site at: <http://www.centennialcaravan.org>

Refuges at the Zoo Centennial Celebration



SAN DIEGO ZOO



The Zoo Crew

*Dr.
Zoolittle
assisted
by the
Blue
Goose*



*Our
Banner
at the
Zoo*



An Opportunity For Educating

THE CALIFORNIA FIRES

HOW THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICES'S "WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE PROGRAM" HELD UP AGAINST CALIFORNIA'S HISTORIC FIRE

by Greg Hultman

The San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex first received money from the National Fire Plan to implement the Wildland Urban Interface Program (WUI) in fiscal year 2001. The money was used to create and improve thirteen fuelbreaks on the San Diego NWR Complex for approximately 360 acres and to fund similar projects through two local Fire Protection Districts, Crest and San Diego Rural, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

San Diego Rural's Fire Chief has been proactive in implementing the WUI funds into projects on the ground in his jurisdiction. The first funded project was Ordinance 2002-02, which gave San Diego Rural the legal authority to declare certain waste material to be a public nuisance and gave them authority to remove and bill for collection. This ordinance set the tempo for 100% compliance of weed abatement in their protection district. To date 354 homes have gone into violation, of the 354 homes, 244 complied on their own and 41 went to Fire Prevention Services for mitigation and were billed for the service.



In fiscal year 2002, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors increased defensible space around structures from 30 feet to 100 feet. Chief Nissen and I knew this was in our best interest, but would be a hardship on many residents, so we developed a plan to assist local homeowners. If the residents cut and stacked the brush we would provide a chipper and crew to chip the material on site, thus eliminating costly dump runs and associated fees. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) would purchase the chipper and fund a crew, while San Diego Rural Fire Protection District (SDRFPD) would manage the program, hire workers, and report accomplishment to us bi-weekly. The program has been very successful, and as of October 5, 2003 we have assisted 410 households for a total of 2,456 acres. The request has made it necessary to purchase another chipper and crew.

On October 17, 2003, San Diego Rural completed a 25 acre fuelbreak in Proctor Valley, funded through fiscal year 2003 WUI funds. This fuelbreak protects 350 acres of urban interface lands with 175 custom homes on it. The project was completed using FWS equipment, a John Deere Tractor with mower attachment, and SDRFPD employees. Houses in this area sell from \$650,000 to \$1,000,000.

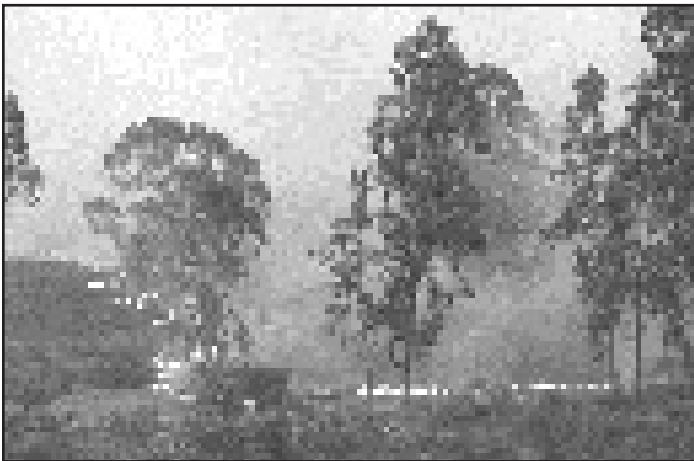
San Diego County has had below average rainfall for several years and this year was no exception. Throughout the summer temperatures were from mid 90's to 100+. During the final days of October, Red Flag warnings were predicted with above average temperatures. In the late afternoon of October 25, 2003, a fire started on Cleveland National Forest Lands and quickly spread into neighboring jurisdictions including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, San Diego Rural Fire Protection District and the Crest Fire Protection District. In the next several days two other fires were started. Between the three fires, we had a firestorm that went from Valley Center in Escondido to the Mexican Border and below with catastrophic results in most areas.

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Wildlife Urban Interface Program


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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service responded a Type 3 Engine based at the Sacramento NWR which was covering the San Diego Refuge and two Chief Officers to the Otay-Mine Fire. The Otay-Mine fire (45,000 acres), posed an immediate threat to both FWS lands and the San Diego Rural Fire Protection District. Carefully planned backfires and the evacuation of a campground by FWS Battalion Chief, Larry Wade saved lives and restricted the loss of FWS lands on this fire to 287 acres. The fuelbreak constructed in Proctor Valley stopped the fire from burning an estimated 100+ homes (no structures lost on this fire) and was used to set backfires that prevented the fire from crossing Proctor Valley Road and burning up to 8,000 acres of refuge lands. The Proctor Valley Fuelbreak was also used to tie in a dozer line to Highway 94 which served as a firing line that saved 50 acres of State Fish and Game Land and their main office. It is too early to determine how many homes were saved by our chipping program and Ordinance 2002-02 which made Hazardous Fuel Reduction an enforceable law in San Diego Rural's Fire Protection District. This information will be available soon.



The Cedar Fire (280,000 acres) burned through the town of Crest causing major structure loss (150 homes) in the Crest Fire Protection District and burned 67 acres of refuge lands. U.S. Fish and Wildlife responded both its Type 3 Engines to this fire.

New fuelbreaks constructed from Wildland Urban Interface funds saved between 65 and 100 million dollars in structure loss and saved approximately 8,000 acres of San Diego National Refuge Lands.

The funds provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through the National Fire Plan to reduce loss from fire in the urban interface and to protect refuge lands was very successful, when the money was put on the ground to reduce fuel loading. 

The Life of a Firefighter During the 2003 Firestorms

Jim Mitchell,
Engineer
USFWS
Fire Management
Engine 58

On a typical day at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fire Station in Jamul, our crews follow a daily



routine that includes first checking out the fire engine and firefighter safety gear to ensure a state of readiness. After the morning readiness check, our crews participate in some sort of physical fitness training like hosepack hike, running or other exercise. Throughout the rest of an ordinary day, we'll work around the station or the refuge on various projects. At some point, we will also participate in a training exercise or drill pertaining to our firefighting duties: hoselays, fire shelter training or other firefighting techniques. While performing our regular daily duties, we know and are aware that a typical day in the firehouse can change at a moment's notice.

A typical day turned into a very atypical day on October 25, 2003 at approximately 5:30 p.m. when Engine 58 was dispatched to the Cedar Fire for the initial attack. When we arrived in the area, access to the fire was impossible. Within a short period of time the fire grew in size and intensity and began

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Life Of A Firefighter

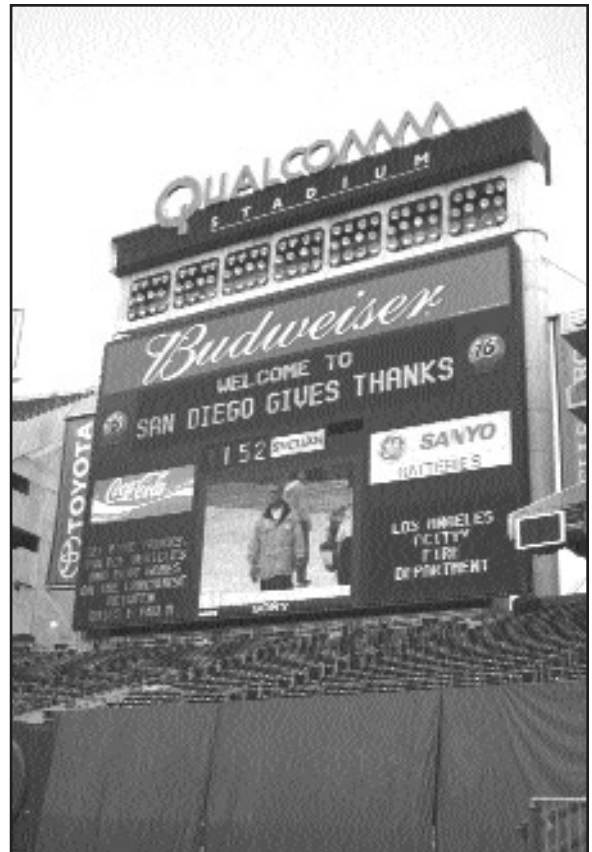
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advance toward the community of Ramona and San Diego Country Estates. All of the agencies involved quickly shifted into a defensive mode for structure protection. Our battle lasted for the next fifty-seven hours with no rest or food.


The County of San Diego was under a Red Flag Warning for strong northeast winds starting on the evening of October 25, 2003. This particular fire was unlike others we have been involved with during most of our careers; no matter how hard and fast you worked, the fire was always ahead of you and eliminating everything in its path. At times the conditions and surrounding fire environment made it very difficult to perform our jobs. It was also very stressful and difficult for us to have to watch homes burn, but at times there was just nothing we could do because of the magnitude of the fire and our limited resources.

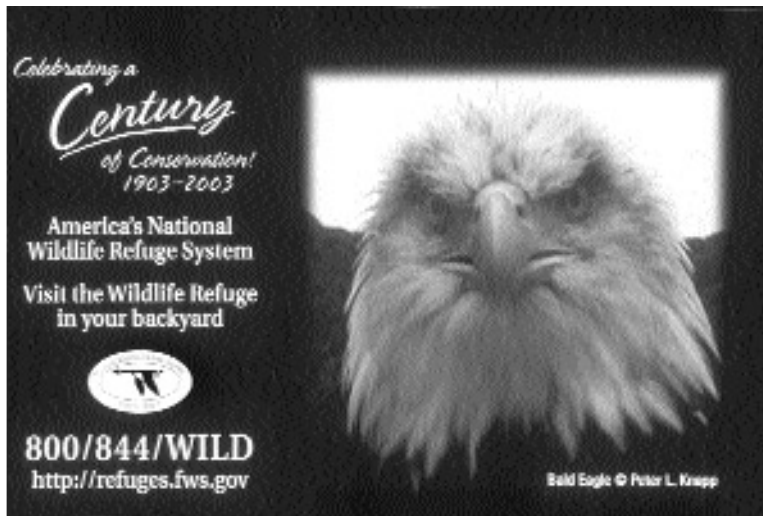


As difficult as this fire was to bring under control, our fire crews performance was outstanding, as



was the performance of crews from other fire agencies. It was also very much a learning experience for many of us. We are all grateful we returned home to our families and friends safely. For all the difficulties, it was a privilege for our agency's fire crew to help in battling the one of the largest fires in California's history.

On November 16, after all the smoke and chaos had settled down and the fires were under control, San Diego Mayor Dick Murphy put together a spectacular and very much appreciated event at Qualcomm Stadium, "Firefighter Appreciation Day." This was a very heart-warming experience for all public safety personnel and it was nice to know that the community was so extremely appreciative and supportive of all public safety efforts during the Firestorms of 2003. 



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For information contact Barbara Simon, (619) 691-1262.

Visit us on the web at <http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>



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